

AN (3) *Handley*
E S S A Y *James*
ON THE
CONDUCT AND CHARACTER
OF
ST. P E T E R,

CONSIDERED AS GIVING EVIDENCE
TO THE
TRUTH of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

*Published, in pursuance of the Will of the late Mr. NORRIS, as having gained
the Annual Prize instituted by him in the University of Cambridge.*

BY THE
REV. THOMAS GRIMWOOD TAYLOR, M.A.
FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE.

Ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ ΠΕΤΡΑῖ οικοδομήσω μὲν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν. MAT. XVI. 18,

C A M B R I D G E,

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ESSAY
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WOLCOTT.

AN

ESSAY, &c.

WERE we to rest the evidence of the Christian Religion upon the lives and deaths of the first Apostles, all confirming the particulars of that testimony which is delivered in their writings, there would be more than enough to satisfy the scruples, and establish the belief of every rational enquirer. The treachery of Judas, the denial of Peter, the doubts of Thomas, the fears of all, eventually afford a distinct confirmation of the power and even divinity of Him, whom they had betrayed or forsaken. And if the vices or the errors of his chosen ministers bear record to the "doctrine of GOD OUR SAVIOUR," what ornament, what light, what fulness must it receive from their virtues! If the truth of our religion "is made perfect in their weakness," how much more by their strength?

A

THE present Essay is designed to consider the evidence arising from the conduct and character of one of these disciples,—a disciple, whose history might be sufficient of itself to prove the truth of the Christian Religion, of which he was a chief apostle. It was of him our heavenly Master declared, “Upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” And as an earnest of this promise he surnamed him Peter,—or “Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone.” He, who knew the hearts of all men, assigned to the same apostle “the keys of the kingdom of heaven;” and invested him with this high and sacred authority, “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.” This and other honourable distinctions recorded in holy scripture must naturally awaken in every religious mind a lively interest in the history of St. Peter, as a principal Founder of the Christian Church; though they afford no just argument in support of the Supremacy, which the Church of Rome ascribes to him.

I SHALL consider the character and conduct of this apostle as they are mutually connected

with each other, and concur to add their respective evidence to "the faith," which he "delivered to the Saints." For as the character of a man is to be known only from a general view of his conduct or history, so the evidence arising from each particular instance of conduct will be best determined by a previous knowledge of sentiment and character.

ST. PETER, as might be imagined, had many marks of character in common with the other disciples; and some also peculiar to himself. It is remarkable of all, whom our Saviour chose for his apostles, that they were taken from those situations of life, which are devoid of interest, and exposed to contempt,—without dignity, without science, without riches, without authority. Such is the peculiar and distinguishing character of the Christian calling, "that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to

Bring to nought things that are." By the preaching of a few obscure and unlearned men, possessed of neither rank nor talents to command, the religion of Christ was quickly established in opposition to the wit, the prejudices, the corruptions, in defiance of the malice and violence of all the rich and the learned, the great and the powerful, both of Jews and Gentiles. Though its progress was rapid beyond example, and great without comparison, it owed nothing to the aid of any human means. It flourished in despite of the powers of man, that all the glory might be of God,—that it might be known of all men to be His work,—that it might be said, "Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings," in might or knowledge, "hast thou ordained strength, that thou mightest still the enemy."

Our apostle Simon and his brother Andrew were called from the humble occupation of fishers, to be the disciples of the Saviour of the world,—or, to speak in the simple language of scripture, "to become fishers of men." St. Peter had no qualifications in himself, he was not in any of those circumstances of life, which are found to give weight and influence in the

world. He had no learning to persuade, no wealth to allure, no power to awe; and yet, when he preached before an assembly of Jews and Profelytes out of every nation under heaven, “the same day there were added unto” the Church “about three thousand souls.” And why this surprizing and instant success? Was there any thing in the subject of the apostle’s preaching, that was adapted to please the pride or the passions of this goodly multitude? Was St. Peter heard to flatter their prejudices, to sanction their errors, or excuse their vices? Was he seen to indulge them in their favourite sins, or gratify their known inclinations and desires? The speech of the apostle was of a very different nature. It was calculated to wound all the liveliest feelings, and mortify the pride of his hearers. It struck at the root of their antient prejudices; it boldly exposed and reproved their conduct; it openly accused both them and their rulers, the high priests of their law whom they were taught to revere, of the most heinous and abominable crimes. It told them that they, and all the chiefs of their city, were the most unjust and nefarious murderers,—they had “taken, and by wicked hands had crucified and slain a man approved of God among them by

miracles, and wonders, and signs." The more to confound their pride, and sharpen the stings of conscience, the apostle declared to them, that "God had raised Him up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it,"—that it was He, who had given the certain and unerring sign of almighty power, which they now saw and heard; who, "being by the right hand of God exalted, had shed forth upon his followers the promise of the Holy Ghost," whereof they all were witnesses. And he concluded his address with reminding them at once of their own aggravated guilt, and the authority and godhead of that same Jesus, whom they had condemned as a transgressor.

WE may reasonably ask how it came to pass, that men, who were thus reproached and reviled by the whole speech of Peter, should still continue to hear him patiently. The history informs us they did more than this: no sooner had the apostle finished, than they "were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And when St. Peter opened to them the ways of salvation, they "gladly received

his word, and continued steadfast in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship." What cause are we then to assign for this great and sudden change? Why did they, who had lately seen this Jesus of Nazareth "crucified in weakness,"—who had beheld him arrayed in a crown of thorns, and a reed put in his hand in derision,—who had looked on, while he was condemned and made to suffer a mean and ignominious death,—who perhaps were among the multitude that mocked and spit upon him, that buffeted and smote him with the palms of their hands,—why did these men cast off at once all their national prejudices, convict themselves of having "killed the Prince of life," and desire to be baptized in his name? It is not possible to give any other rational account of so extraordinary a fact, but that the apostle was the minister and witness of the truth, and the God of truth was with him to assert and maintain it. The people, who heard him, knew that he spoke the truth,—they knew that He, who had been condemned to die, was indeed "a righteous man,"—they heard from many besides the apostles, who had seen and conversed with him after he was risen, that he was truly in his own person, and with his crucified body, restored to life,—they perceived

that “ many wonders and signs were done by the hands of the apostles,”—they had before their eyes a present miracle; they saw the disciples of Jesus, who was crucified, “ all filled with the Holy Ghost,”—they heard these unimproved and illiterate men “ begin to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance.”

“ Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews, and Proselytes, Cretes, and Arabians,” they did “ hear them speak in” their several “ tongues the wonderful works of God.”

It is on the same principle that we are to account for the swift and astonishing progress of the Christian faith in the various parts of the Gentile world. There was nothing to recommend it to the adoption of mankind, but its own intrinsic excellence, authority, and truth. And yet the belief of this religion did prevail, though it was opposed by all the force of learning and power, combined to denounce and overthrow it. It did prevail, though the Lord of it was one, who had lived in contempt as

the lowest of mankind, who had died in ignominy as the vilest malefactor. It did prevail, though the preachers of it were the furthest possible from that description of men, who take the lead in society; whose opinions it is the pride of others to adopt, and whose example it is their ambition to follow. It did prevail, though it bore an uniform testimony against all the impieties and vices of the world; and though it exposed every one who received it to disgrace, persecution, and poverty*. And wherefore these early triumphs of a new religion under every discouragement which the world could oppose? We may leave this question to be answered in the words of Gamaliel, no friend to the Christian cause, "If this counsel or this work" had been "of men, it" must have "come to nought: but," because it was "of God," they could "not overthrow it."—We will not pursue the argument, because St. Peter was employed more particularly in the conversion of

* The Author has borrowed some expressions in this place from a small Tract, entitled *An answer to the Question, Why are you a Christian?* published in Boston, by John Clarke, a Minister of that Church, and reprinted in London.—Where he found the sentiments he wished to convey so concisely and forcibly expressed, he would not weaken the argument by substituting inferior language of his own.

the Jews, and was therefore called “ the apostle of the circumcision.” It is only to be remarked, that the obstacles, which presented themselves in bringing the Heathens unto Christ, were greatly increased in the case of the Jews by the prejudices, the pride, and the guilt of their nation.

I PROCEED to observe another general feature in the characters and conduct of all the apostles, and of St. Peter in particular,—which is, the artless simplicity that runs through the whole. Men, who had any intention or wish to deceive, would have been eager to embrace every passing occasion of recommending themselves, or the Founder of their faith, to the esteem and admiration of their followers. As the Preachers of a pure and undefiled religion, they would be careful to represent their own character and conduct without spot or blemish, while they would enlarge upon the miracles, real or fictitious, recorded of their Lord and Master. It was not so with those, who have written the history of the life and miracles of Christ, and the Acts of his Apostles. The wonders of the facts they relate are only to be equalled by the simplicity, with which they are recorded. They give a detail of the most extraordinary miracles,

and evidences of divine power, without exaggeration and even without comment. And in the incidents related of the first disciples their history is equally faithful and unadorned. The vanity and weakness of Peter are recorded with the same unaffected candour, with which they speak his praises. This is the more remarkable in the gospel of St. Mark, his own particular convert and disciple; which has been frequently styled St. Peter's gospel, because it was principally composed by the Evangelist out of the account he had gathered from the discourses of Peter, and received the stamp of his approbation and authority.* And it is a singular instance of impartial simplicity, that the Fall of Peter is mentioned in these writings with some circumstances of aggravation, which are not noticed by the other Evangelists.

It would be easy to gather from the Sacred History many other demonstrations of pure simplicity in the character and conduct of St. Peter. We shall content ourselves with referring to a single example, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. As Peter and John went

* Euseb. lib. II. cap. 15.

up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, asked alms of them; when Peter, with that unaffected humility which is the handmaid of truth, instead of magnifying the greater and more exalted gift he was about to confer, excused himself for that which he had not to give. "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." And when the people were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened, the meek apostle openly disclaimed the praise of it. "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" Was this the conduct or the language of a deceiver? An artful impostor would have appealed to the miracle as an evidence of his high commission,—a seal of the power which he had received from heaven. Or if he had chosen to reflect the glory from himself upon Christ as the head of the Church, would it have been with the simplicity, with which Peter spake to the admiring multitude? or the temperate firmness, with which he defended himself the next day before the rulers, and elders, and scribes,

“ If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole?”

I HAVE adduced this history as an instance, among many others, of artless simplicity in the conduct of the apostle. If the miracle had been feigned, a deceiver would have made a greater use of it. He would have converted it into an occasion either of boasting himself, or of “ magnifying his office.” But of the truth of the miracle, to say nothing of other proof, the history furnishes its own evidence. When we combine the simplicity of the apostle’s character with his want of those attainments, that command or engage respect; and yet see the rapid success of his doctrine, insomuch that “ the number of the men which believed,” after this miracle, “ was about five thousand;” we must marvel, as did the rulers who sat in judgement on him, “ when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men.” We must be forced

to confess, that " indeed a notable miracle had been wrought ;" and that " it was manifest to all them that dwelt in Jerusalem."

I do not enlarge upon the other miracles recorded of this apostle, the striking of Ananias and Sapphira with death, the healing of the sick by " the shadow of Peter passing by," the raising Tabitha to life again, after her dead body was made ready for burial, or his own deliverance out of prison by the hand of an angel, because these wonders are rather to be considered as wrought of God in confirmation of St. Peter's apostleship, than to be adduced as instances of conduct in the apostle himself. But in whatever light we regard these workings of almighty power, they give an equal degree of evidence to the truth of the Christian Religion.

It affords a strong presumption of veracity and faithfulness in the testimony of St. Peter and the other disciples, that it is impossible to assign any reasonable motive for their attempting to impose a falsehood on the world. For had they any one temptation to deceive? any interest to serve in preaching Jesus and the resurrection? Would it promote their success and advance-

ment in the world? or give them the pleasures of it in greater abundance? Would it raise them to honours, riches, or power,—the chief and favourite objects of human ambition? We know it was altogether, it was pointedly the reverse. Their Lord himself forewarned them that it would be so. “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: and ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake; and they shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you.” It was not long before the apostles felt the truth of this declaration. The Religion of Christ, and its professors, were every where the objects of contempt and persecution,—to the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Heathen foolishness. The rulers hated, the rich oppressed, the learned scorned, and all persecuted them. There could not be any disposition to deceive, where the deceit was in opposition to every interest in this world, and in that which is to come,—for in that other life they could have no hope, except their religion were true.

BUT were we to suppose men (contrary to every principle of action) inclined to triumph in the success of their imposture, though it were in a prison or under stripes, would they have

been seen to carry on the deceit through life even to the close of it? Must not the terrors of death, aggravated by torture, have forced them at length to save themselves by abjuring principles which they knew to be false? Yet these apostles "rejoiced that they were counted worthy" not only "to suffer shame in the name of Jesus," but to lay down their lives for his sake. The circumstances, that are related of St. Peter's martyrdom, afford a striking testimony to the truth of the doctrines which he preached. The apostle, being condemned to suffer death upon the cross, desired to be suspended with his head downwards, alledging that he was unworthy to die in the same manner, as his Lord and Master had expired before him. Now we appeal to the heart of every reasonable man, we would refer it to the judgement even of an enemy, whether any man would have chosen so unnatural and agonizing a posture in honour of a false prophet, with whom he had joined in leading the world astray? whether he would have given this singular and remarkable testimony even by the manner of his dying, if he had known "the preaching of the cross to be foolishness,"—if he had known the Author of it to be crucified and slain, but not to be risen, as it

was said of him, not to be ascended into the heavens, not to have wrought the many miracles, and wonders, and signs, under the pretence of which he had imposed upon the credulity of mankind?

BUT no, says the unbelieving philosopher; your apostle was not a deceiver, but an enthusiast,—he was himself deceived. There have been many martyrs in defence of different religions, some of which must of necessity be false; and why then may not the faith of the apostles be false also?—The distinction is clear and obvious; the one died in support of matters of opinion, where the wisest of men are often deceived; the other in attestation of matters of fact, where the most ignorant cannot be mistaken. The voluntary sufferings of both we readily admit to be a clear and unquestionable proof of sincerity. But who can say, that the weight of their testimony is the same? or their evidence alike either in kind or degree? Our faith stands upon solid grounds, when it is built upon the evidence of the apostles of Christ, who were eye-witnesses of all which they relate. But is it so in the case of any other martyrs? or, greatly as we honour and respect their piety, must it not be confessed that their testimony rests upon no

better authority, than human interpretation and human conjecture? For what had these men to testify by their deaths? what but their own convictions, sentiments, persuasions, in which they might be deceived, mistaken, mis-informed? in which education, prejudice, connections, friendships, will have a secret influence upon the most honest minds? The evidence afforded by the apostolic martyrs was of a quite different nature. They had lived and conversed with Christ in the days of his flesh; and, after he was put to death, they “went into all the world, preaching the gospel to every creature.” They declared, that they had received commission from Him to proclaim salvation and the remission of sins in his name,—that as an evidence of his divine authority and nature, they had seen him work divers miracles, heal the sick, give sight to the blind, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead. And when he had finished the days of his appointed time upon earth, they all witnessed with one accord, that they had seen him give up the ghost upon the cross,—that they saw his body laid in the tomb, and a stone rolled to the door, and sealed, and guarded by a watch,—that they did afterwards see him alive from the dead, they heard him speak, they handled him, and felt the print of the nails, to certify them

that it was indeed their crucified Master. They repeated this openly in the presence of those, who had knowledge of many of the facts they recorded; who had all been witnesses to the miracles of Christ; who were all acquainted with the circumstances of his death; and some had even seen him after he was risen. They appealed to them for the truth of their testimony; they published it boldly in every place; and at length they laid down their lives to shew, that their faith was sincere, and their record true. Here was no room for error, uncertainty, or doubt. These disciples were well informed of the truths, for which they died; they could not be deceived; they could not be mistaken. No man is so learned as to be sure that what he thinks is right, more especially upon subjects of faith, which are confessedly above the reach of human comprehension: nor is there any man, however uninformed and weak, but knows the truth and the certainty of that which he has "heard and seen." The apostles therefore were the most competent and able witnesses. They speak on sure and certain grounds, the evidence of their own senses. They appeal to us in language the most convincing and forcible, "That which was from the beginning, which we have

heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled the word of life,—that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.”

If then St. Peter could not be deceived himself,—if he wanted the means of deceiving others, and all those talents which are requisite for ordinary success in the cause of truth,—if his character was remarkable for honest simplicity,—if he sacrificed all that men hold most dear, his ease, his comfort, his occupation, his life, in asserting the truth of the Christian religion,—is it not just, is it not reasonable, is it not right to conclude, that he had neither followed, nor devised “a cunning fable, when he made known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; but was an eye-witness of his Majesty?” Is it not the natural, I had almost said, the necessary conviction, that his testimony is sure, and his faith divine?

ST. PETER however has left a surer testimony than words in support of that, which is the great foundation of the Christian's hope, the resurrection of his Lord and Saviour. His life is a

faithful comment on his doctrine; his actions speak for him; and they speak in unison with what he has written, and what is written of him. This is likewise true of all the apostles: their conduct affords a consistent and concurring testimony with what the scripture has declared, that Jesus “ shewed himself alive to them after his passion by many infallible proofs.” When their Lord was led to judgment and to death, “ the disciples all forsook him, and fled.” They had not the courage to stand by their suffering Master, lest they should be made to share in his reproaches and his fate. Peter, in spite of all his boasted professions, in spite of the prophetic warnings of his Master, in spite of clear and evident conviction, three times denied that he even knew him. A short time only was passed, and these same disciples were heard to preach in the name of Jesus with great boldness before all the people. He, who had so late denied his Master, was the first to declare in defiance of danger the glories of his salvation. “ Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” And whence this great change in the mind of the apostle? Why did he, who was fearful, irresolute, and

weak, in all the perils and sufferings of his Lord, on a sudden become firm and unmoved at his own? Was it not the faith, the assurance, the certainty of Christ's resurrection from the dead, that banished from his mind every sentiment of fear, inspired him with courage to speak and to act, fortified him with patience to suffer?

THE truth is, the apostles, like the rest of the Jews, were led away by false and mistaken expectations of a temporal Prince; they looked for one, who should "restore again the kingdom to Israel;" they thought that Christ was this Messiah, when they beheld his miracles, and the mighty signs that were done by the word of his mouth. But when they saw Jesus led away to be crucified, and no one to deliver him from this reproachful death, all their high-raised hopes failed them at once: they could look for no help from one that was dead; they had no conception or idea of his rising again*; and therefore, as disappointed and despairing men, they sought to hide themselves from the contempt and revilings of the world. But no sooner were these disciples assured by the evidence of their senses, that Christ was risen indeed, than

* Vid. John ii. 22. John xvi. 17, 18. Luke xxiv. 21-25.

they gladly received him as their Lord and their God. They began to see their errors; they called to mind all that the prophets had spoken, and what Christ had foretold of himself; and they “believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.” And when “their eyes were opened, that they might understand the scriptures,”—when their minds had been enlightened, and their hearts confirmed by the descent of the Holy Ghost,—they were no longer content with silent adoration; they published abroad the things which they had seen and heard; they “spake the word of God with boldness,” and “preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

It was natural that the great outlines of St. Peter's conduct and character, considered as giving evidence to the truth of the Christian Religion, should be similar in their principle to the arguments, which are usually drawn from the lives of the apostles in general. All that has been attempted in this Essay is to apply these principles and arguments to the particular history recorded of St. Peter. We may remark, however, in the narrative of this apostle's life

some traits of character, and circumstances of conduct, which are more peculiarly his own.

THERE appears in various instances of St. Peter's conduct, interspersed in the sacred Volume, a certain impetuosity of thought and disposition,—a hastiness of temper, which marks his character. It was this which was the occasion of all his humiliation. It was this disposition, which prompted his vain and presumptuous boasting, “Although all shall be offended, yet will not I,”—“If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.” It was this disposition, which led him to forfeit these high pretensions, and “deny with an oath, I do not know the man.” Had he thought thereon, he would have “remembered the word of the Lord how he said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.” He would have called to mind his own plighted promise, and the severe rebuke that must follow the breach of it. He would never have afforded such a memorable instance both of the vanity and weakness of the human heart. Every man's own observation will furnish him with similar instances*: it is sufficient for our purpose to

* Vid. Mat. xvi. 22, 23. John xviii. 10, 11.

remark, that this inconsiderate warmth of disposition is in its nature and consequences most opposite to deceit. There is generally found by experience the least of subtilty in the most hasty tempers: and reason will teach us that, if there were any latent subtilty, an impetuous mind would be always liable to betray it.

WE may further trace this inconsiderate spirit leading Peter into a dispute with his fellow-apostle Paul. Had there not been strong and incontrovertible evidence of "the truth as it is in Jesus," such disputes must at once have been sufficient to overthrow the Christian cause. The rising Church must have been crushed in its infancy by the dissensions of its nursing fathers. It must certainly be admitted a fair presumption, that these apostles were not conspiring to propagate deceit, or they would never have broken out into open contention. Paul could have been moved by no other consideration than the love of truth, in a public letter to his Galatian Converts, to rebuke and censure one, who was leagued with him in the same cause. However a nice and discerning eye may mark some smaller shades of disagreement and contrariety in the most cunning impostors, there are none that

have not the wisdom to refrain from publicly confuting each other. Or if they had the weakness thus to engender divisions, who does not see that their own folly must have been the downfall of their cause? Who can believe that men of such perverse minds and contrary sentiments could have triumphed over the hosts that stood opposed against them? "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation: and a house divided against a house, falleth." And if Paul be divided against Peter, how should their preaching stand?—except it were with them, as with their divine Master, that men were struck with conviction "at their doctrine; for their word was with power."

HAD the gospel described the first Teachers of Christianity free from those little bickerings and failings which are common to humanity, it might perhaps, by representing them to be more than men, have been exposed to the imputation of being a fair device,—a creature of the imagination, like the systems of modern times, setting forth man as he ought to be, rather than as he is. But now they stand confessed, they even declare themselves to be "men of like passions," infirmities, and errors with us, yet over-ruled

in all they deliver for the instruction of others by inspiration of God,—it marks the impartial truth and scrupulous exactness, while it detracts nothing from the authenticity, of the Christian Scriptures. The Jewish prejudices of one apostle, and keen sense of injury in the other, and the divisions which they kindled in the infant Church, do but display more strongly in the rapid progress of Christianity the power of its divine Author; who “maketh the wrath of man to praise him,” and converts the animosities and dissensions of his followers into arguments of his truth and evidences of his word.

I CANNOT leave this part of St. Peter's history without noticing another prominent feature of his character, which must greatly recommend him as a faithful witness,—I mean, his Candour. Though he had been so harshly and severely rebuked by his “fellow-labourer in the gospel,”—though his cause was espoused by the Jewish converts, who formed no inconsiderable part of the early Christians,—yet to shew that he was not offended at what Paul had said of him,—to prevent him from suffering in the estimation of the Jewish Christians, and consequent success of his ministry,—he commends

him to all the Saints in a general letter to the Churches under his direction. He even goes so far as to add his sanction to the Epistles which Paul had written, "Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you."—We must certainly have observed in the Sacred History many more indications of a frank and ingenuous spirit in the conduct of St. Peter. His impetuous character often hurried him into errors, which he never wanted the candour to acknowledge. When Christ was employed in the humiliating office of washing his disciples' feet, Peter felt an honest but presumptuous indignation; and, in the unthinking warmth of mistaken zeal, forgetting the mysterious wisdom which guided every action of his divine Master, he said to him, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But in the next instant, hearing the sad alternative from the mouth of his Lord, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," he aptly recovered himself with a readiness of conviction, which turned even his error into an occasion of virtue, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Perhaps it may seem preposterous to adduce the melancholy history of Peter's repeated denials of his Master in proof

of his candour and integrity of heart. Yet to me it does appear, even under these circumstances, that a man of a less ingenuous disposition, after confronting three such pointed accusations, would not have been moved by a single and distant look of the Man whom he had denied,—of one who at that instant was arraigned and under judgement at Pilate's bar, and who had disappointed the fond expectations and hopes that had been raised in the minds of his disciples. The Lord had no sooner “turned and looked upon Peter,” than he felt and expressed the sorrow of a penitent. He saw the marks of more than human prescience; he was ashamed of having forsaken and denied so great and good a Master; and “he went out, and wept bitterly.” We must respect such a character even amidst the ruins of his Fall*; and much more in all the dignity of his succeeding virtues. One who was so ready to acknowledge truth, though

* There was certainly in all the circumstances of St. Peter's Fall, the beginning as well as the close of it, something that bespoke a great and noble mind, obscured under a cloud. His magnanimous spirit carried him, as it were, beyond himself: in the vast stretch of his love he forgot his own infirmity; and he greatly attempted what he wanted strength to fulfil,—so that, what the Heathens said of the Sublime in Writing, may justly be applied to the Conduct of the Apostle,

Μεγάλως ἀπολισθαίνειν ὁμῶς ἐνγενὲς αἰμάρτημα:

Longin. de Sublim.

it reflected shame upon himself, would never be the wilful promoter of error.

ST. PETER also discovered a peculiar energy of character, which gives weight and authority to his whole testimony. He was foremost upon all occasions to vindicate the honour, and assert the cause of his heavenly Master; from whence he was styled by the Antients, with great justice and propriety, the Mouth of the Apostles. It was Peter that first, after the gift of tongues, began to improve the miracle to the praise of Him who gave it; and with what manly dignity! what determined spirit! what nobleness of thought and expression! Need we add to the instances which have been already cited from the Acts of the Apostles? When Peter and John were straitly threatened by the Elders of Israel, and commanded not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus, they put their enemies to silence by the dignified force of their reply, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things, which we have seen and heard." Must we not admire and venerate men of such noble sentiment, such undaunted conduct? If they had not learnt to fear God in

sincerity and truth, would they thus have cast off all the fear of men? If their trust had not been placed in a higher power, would they have had the courage to defy the threats and maliciousness of those, who were armed with force, and sanctioned under authority?

EVEN before the time of his Lord's resurrection, St. Peter was distinguished from the rest of the apostles by a singular strength and vigour of mind. When Christ was forsaken by many of his disciples, and made the affecting appeal to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Simon Peter returned the animated declaration in the name of them all, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." It was for this he received a preeminent honour from the mouth of his divine Master, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." It was for this decision and firmness of character, that he seems to have been selected with the two sons of Zebedee (who on the same account were surnamed "Boanerges, which is the Sons of thunder") to accompany Christ on some great

and important occasions, to which none but themselves were admitted. When he raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, "he suffered no man to go in save Peter, and James, and John." These were the only witnesses of his agony in the garden, at the awful hour preparatory to his passion. The same disciples were with Jesus in the holy mount, when he "received from God the Father honour and glory." They heard "the voice, which came to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And herein they afford a peculiar evidence not only to the truth of our religion in general, but also to some of the leading articles of our faith, the Fulness of the Godhead and Atonement of Christ.

AND here it will be proper to obviate a specious objection, that might be urged against this, and indeed every part of the evidence which has been adduced. It may be said, You are attempting to prove the truth of the Christian religion from the conduct and character of the apostle Peter; while you make the scriptures, or records of that religion, the ground and foundation of your argument.—Without

enquiring from what source we are to take the history of the apostle, except it be from these scriptures, or from the writings of the early Christians, or from some scattered remarks of the enemies of Christianity, we may at once reply that the objection is rather in words than in reason,—in appearance, not in reality. For we have been considering no other than the internal evidence of the Christian Religion, as it is deducible from the conduct and character of St. Peter. Our argument, whether it be thought convincing or not, aims at no more than this, that the conduct and character of St. Peter, as they are represented in the sacred writings, bear every mark of simplicity, disinterestedness, and truth; his actions prove him to be a faithful and sincere, as his situation renders him a competent witness,—that it is impossible to account for the known success of his preaching, with his known inability to influence or allure, except we admit the gospel, of which he was the minister, to have been (in the words of a fellow-apostle) “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believed;” except we admit the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ, which these believers must either have been eye-

witnesses to themselves, or had opportunities of hearing from those who had seen them,—that upon no other principle can the conduct of the apostle be explained; not only his submitting to persecution and death in vindication of the facts, as well as doctrines, which he preached; but the sudden turn of his conduct from despair to confidence, from fearfulness to bold and intrepid assurance, at a time when there was every thing to depress and overwhelm his hopes, if Christ were not risen. This is an evidence of the most sure and certain kind; the least liable to error, mis-information, or deceit. It has never yet happened, that an impostor has not ultimately betrayed his fraud by his own endeavours to conceal it. The very artifices, by which he imposed upon the faith of his contemporaries, have been the means of discovering the device to posterity. It is a peculiar recommendation of St. Peter's testimony, that his character and conduct are in direct opposition to what would have been the natural line of conduct adopted by a cunning deceiver. Art must always betray more or less of design: the whole history of the apostle's life is without design, without uniformity, without common consistency, except it be

explained by the circumstances, by which it was directed, — circumstances, that constitute the leading and essential articles of the Christian faith.

IF we consider the nature of St. Peter's Epistles, we shall not look for that kind of argument in them, which has been drawn with so much force, and originality of reasoning, from the Epistles of St. Paul*. The most minute and indirect coincidences of things in themselves indifferent and trivial, a name, a place, a date, a journey (the recurrence of which is rendered frequent by the very particularity of St. Paul's Epistles) afford internal proof of the reality and truth of the Sacred History; because they are too complete to have been the work of chance, and too remote to be the effect of design. Whereas the Epistles of St. Peter being Catholic, and addressed to the whole Christian Church dispersed "throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," are filled with general exhortation and instruction, such as the occasion required; but do not admit of the mention of those little and incidental circumstances, which form the ground of argument in

* Vide Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*,

the comparison of St. Paul's Epistles with the Acts of the Apostles, and with one another. Yet we cannot allow these Epistles to be without their weight in the scale of Christian Evidence. I would ask any candid and unprejudiced Judge, whether he does not discover a striking uniformity in the character of St. Peter, as it is delineated by the sacred Writers, and as it is discoverable in the stile, and manner, and sentiments of his two * Epistles? Do they not bear the marks of the same energy, the same unpolished and nervous simplicity, the same impetuosity and vehemence of thought, the same strength and vigour of untutored genius? Compare them with any of St. Paul's Epistles,—in the one you perceive the learning of a man, that had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and was

* I am aware that doubts have been entertained by some, whether St. Peter was the Author of the second Epistle that is inscribed with his name. And these objections are urged, in part, on the ground of a supposed *difference* of stile; but chiefly because the former Epistle only is found in the first Syriack Version. Many more however are agreed that both these Epistles are genuine; and remark, among other circumstances, a *general likeness* (and general likeness is all we are contending for) of stile and character. We leave this to the convictions of individual judgement: while the opinion of Professor Michaelis (page 86. of Marsh's Translation) and other weighty authorities in favour of the genuineness of this Epistle, are a sufficient sanction for the argument that is here founded upon it.

instructed also in the arts and literature of the Gentiles,—in the other the rough and unbroken force of a fisherman, strong in the endowments of nature and the gifts of grace, but without the refinements of art or science. It will not be denied, that this is a just ground of evidence in support of the Christian Religion. It is at once an argument of the truth of Scripture, and the genuineness of St. Peter's Epistles. There would scarcely have been found such a nice agreement between the character of St. Peter given in the writings of others, and exemplified in his own, if the one had been a fiction, or the other spurious. The Volume of the New Testament is in complete and perfect harmony: the several parts of it mutually tend to confirm each other; and it is the same Peter that speaks in the gospel history, in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles which bear his name. The seal of his character (if I may so speak) as it is graven by the Evangelists, is in exact correspondence with the stamp and impression of his letters.

If there be such a light reflecting upon the Christian Religion from the conduct and character of one disciple, what a body of irresistible

evidence is formed by the testimony of the twelve! What new grounds of assurance from the miraculous conversion and ministry of the apostle Paul! What consolidated proof from the conduct and characters of all its early professors! Here is no more than a single pillar in this building of God, which is raised “ upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.” In vain therefore may the enemies of Christianity presume to win by artifice, or carry by storm, the fortrefs of our religion. The venerable pile has been assaulted on every side, and proved impregnable: the materials that compose it have passed the fiery ordeal; every part of the fabric is “ fitly framed together;” and every stone cemented by the blood of its martyrs.

YET there are some who, though they can neither contradict nor disprove the accumulated evidences of the Christian Religion, are still determined, with inflexible obstinacy, to disbelieve or to deny them. They must have certain proofs of their own devising,—such particular signs as each one chooses to require,—such perfect, intuitive, or demonstrative evidence, as would undermine the very foundation of Chris-

tian virtue, and swallow up faith in knowledge*. It may be said of them, as it was spoken by the rich man in the parable of his worldly-minded brethren, "Nay,—but if one rose from the dead, they would believe." If Abraham could

* If we consider the nature of the Christian religion, its evidences, its doctrines, its rewards, they are all peculiarly adapted and ordained for the trial and exercise of our faith. Its *evidences*, as they are offered to us, are not capable of actual and complete demonstration. They are rather recommended to us on grounds of the highest probability†,—by circumstances of credibility sufficient to engage and justify our belief, but not to force or constrain it. Mysterious truths are proposed for its *doctrines* on the authority of divine revelation. The nature of these mysteries, and manner of their operation, we cannot fully comprehend. If they were level to our capacities, they would not serve, as they were intended, for the probation of our faith. The *rewards* proposed to our obedience are evidently framed with the same view. If we had been taught to look for the recompence of virtue wholly in the present life, we should walk (in direct opposition to the design of our religion, as it is explained by St. Paul) "by sight, not by faith." But now we have a great and distant reward proposed,—great, to excite our desires; distant and unseen, to exercise our faith.—So nice is the consistency between the Christian principles and practice, that the beginning, the progress, and the end of our faith all afford an occasion to him, that uses them aright, of obtaining the superior blessings which it promises to them, that "have not seen, and yet have believed."

† *All Historical Evidence can only be probable evidence. Demonstration, properly speaking, is not applicable to the credibility of facts.—As a principle of action, Probability is sufficient; in a state of Trial, it is more to be expected than certainty.*

If any one thinks that we ought to have more than probability to go upon in things of such importance, he should remember, that there is only probable proof that we shall die; it is only probable that the Sun will ever rise again. Yet we go upon these things as Certainties.

Hey's Lectures, Book 1. Ch. xii. Sect. 1.

appeal to "Moses and the prophets" as sufficient evidence of the truth of a judgement to come, the Christian may appeal to One that is greater than Moses,—to Him, of whom Moses and the prophets did write, and in whom their predictions are accomplished. "If they hear not" Christ and his apostles, "neither would they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

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